

# Colorectal Cancer

## What is Colorectal Cancer?

Colorectal cancer is cancer of the colon or rectum. The colon and the rectum are part of the body's digestive system, which removes nutrients from food and stores waste until it passes out of the body. The colon and rectum form an almost 7 foot long muscular tube called the large intestine (also called the large bowel).<sup>1</sup>

## What Causes Colorectal Cancer?

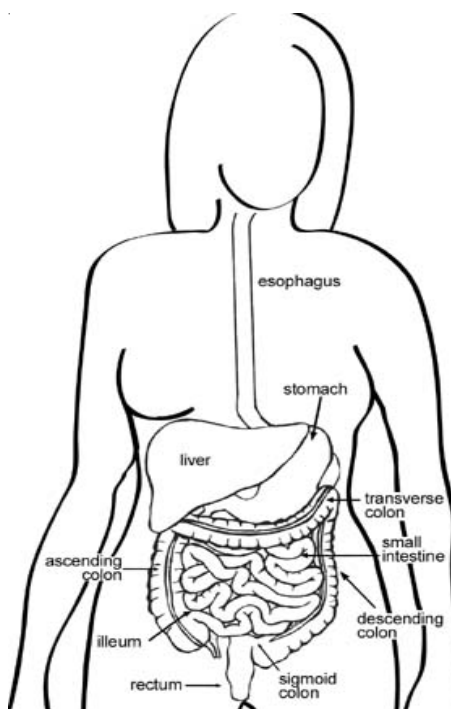
No one knows for sure what causes colorectal cancer, but there are certain risk factors that can increase a person's chances of getting or dying from this type of cancer:

•**Ethnicity/Race:** People of African American and Hispanic descent are often diagnosed at later stage of disease and have a higher death rate.

•**Age:** Women over the age of 50 tend to get this cancer more often than younger women. But, it can happen at any age.

•**Diet:** Colorectal Cancer appears to be linked to diets high in fat and low in fiber.

•**Lifestyle:** Being overweight, not being physically active, drinking alcohol, and smoking may increase a person's chance of developing colorectal cancer.



•**Personal/Family History:** Women who have had breast, ovarian or uterus cancer have a somewhat greater chance of developing colorectal cancer. First-degree relatives (parent, sibling or child) of someone who has had colorectal cancer are also at higher risk.

## Symptoms of Colorectal Cancer

There are often no symptoms of colorectal cancer in its early stages, which is why screening tests are extremely important for diagnosing the disease early. People who do have symptoms can have:

- A change in bowel habits
- Diarrhea, constipation or feeling that the bowel doesn't empty completely
- Bright red or very dark blood in the stool
- Stools that are narrower than normal
- Discomfort in the abdomen
- Weight loss with no known reason
- Constant and extreme tiredness
- Vomiting

## Prevention:

- Get screened starting at age 50, or earlier if you have symptoms or a family or personal history of cancer
- Eat a diet low in fat and high in fiber and brightly colored fruits and vegetables
- Lose weight if you are overweight or obese
- Get regular exercise
- Limit alcohol intake
- If you smoke, QUIT!

Source: National Office on Women's Health  
Website: [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov)

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*This information is provided as a source of education and information and is not a substitute for medical advice or treatment.  
The OWH recommends consultation with your doctor or health care professional.*

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